

## **Washington Journalism Semester**

Professor Gil Klein  
American University

### Contact Informaton

In the order of my preference, the best way to reach me is by email, text and call to my cell phone.

Email: [gklein@american.edu](mailto:gklein@american.edu)

Cell phone: 703-338-2721

## **SEMINAR SYLLABUS**

Welcome to the Washington Semester's Journalism Program. We have five goals for you for this semester. First, we want you to get an internship that will give you professional work experience and begin to develop your network of professional contacts. Second, we want to introduce you to some of the leading journalists and communications professionals who are doing groundbreaking work today. Third, we want you to gain insight into how the federal government operates – both the good and the bad. Fourth, we want you to come away from the program as a better writer and to understand the core values of journalism during this technological upheaval. And fifth, I want you to have an appreciation for the wonderful cultural opportunities available in Washington. This is truly a great and fun city.

We want you to meet as many people and experience as much of the journalistic community of the city as possible. And we want you to come away as incisive reporters and great writers. We will be moving around the city as a class to get to the Capitol, the Supreme Court, the National Press Club, the Newseum and the offices of news organizations of all types. And we will be sending you out on assignments to cover events and interview people.

Many of our classes will combine with the other journalism class taught by Professor Krasnow. In this way, we can have our top speakers reach all of our students, and we can capitalize on each professor's strong points in lectures. Other classes will be separate to give you a better opportunity to

question speakers, to go to places that cannot accommodate so many students and to talk among ourselves about what we are learning. Often Wednesdays will be writing days to give you time to cover stories and to interview people for your assignments.

All written assignments for this 8-credit course must be based on thorough reporting and clear writing, jammed with facts, anecdotes and quotes. When writing a story, be a relentless reporter and above all a perfectionist. That is, strip each sentence down to its cleanest, most powerful components. You will develop style and vocabulary, and of course, make certain to spell every word correctly. (Each word misspelled in a final paper makes the grade drop down one notch.) By the time the semester is over, you will know the difference between good and great writing.

Additionally, you will learn how to excavate the human spirit through interviews in our semester-long focus on The Art of the Interview and how getting solid information leads to solid news writing. You will also be immersed in the core principles of a professional reporter – curiosity, accuracy, tenacity, responsibility – and making your deadline.

By the end of the semester, you will be able to:

- write a spot news story
- write a newsfeature and profile
- write an editorial on political/social issues
- help edit a newspaper/co-produce a class film
- be fearless in pursuing sources and leads
- blog

**COURSE DESCRIPTION.** The course is divided into two components – a seminar and an internship that has an accompanying class. There is a separate syllabus for your Journalism Internship class.

Seminars will take place on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, with Thursdays and Fridays reserved for internships. Weekly seminar schedules will be distributed each Wednesday, listing dates, times, names of speakers, and directions to off-campus seminar locations for the next week. As the semester progresses, classes each week will be balanced among lecture, discussion, and scheduled presentations. You will be expected to contribute meaningfully to class discussions, which means you will need to keep up with readings as they are assigned. You should read carefully and critically,

taking notes, so that you are prepared to discuss and apply the material during each session.

**FOR EVERY SEMINAR, REMEMBER TO...** Be Prompt. Arrive at each seminar at least ten minutes early. We are inviting prominent, busy people to give up their time. Please be respectful and NEVER show up late. Get a good map of the city and become acclimated with the lay of the land and Metro routes as soon as possible. Be prepared for some last-minute schedule changes when speakers must cancel due to breaking news. You will be notified of changes via phone calls and emails. Make sure you check your email before each class for a last-minute change.

Show up. Attendance is mandatory. You may not miss seminars to work on internship activities without specific permission for unusual events. Health problems or mandatory travel plans are the only acceptable excuse for not being present. For an absence to be excused, you must notify me by telephone before the start of the class. Unexcused absences will quickly deflate your final grade.

Speak. You are expected to be outspoken in class. Challenge speakers, and challenge each other as well! It is only in the debating, sharing, even clashing of ideas that you can charge, educate and inspire those around you. And that is ultimately what journalism is all about. But make sure your comments and questions are made respectfully.

Write. Not only will the seminars help you make sense of the topics and issues addressed by the guest speakers and in discussions, but it will also guide you through your own journalism assignments throughout the semester. It is only by studying the core elements of news writing, such as cultivating sources and perfecting the art of the interview, that you will begin to understand the true genesis of a good story.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS/ASSESSMENT**

The seminar grade is composed of five components. The breakdown is as follows:

|                                |     |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| Written assignments            | 40% |
| Class participation/attendance | 25% |
| Mid-term evaluation            | 15% |
| Final paper                    | 20% |

Attendance: Two late arrivals equal one absence. The only excused absence is illness or family emergencies, and you must alert the professor *before class begins*.

Unexcused absences: Twice, and an A becomes an A-; three to four times and an A becomes a B-. And so on down the alphabet.

**SO ATTEND EVERY CLASS**

**WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS.** Throughout the course of the semester, you are responsible for completing several writing assignments. The writing assignments comprise 40% of the final grade. Each assignment is graded according to how well they are written, organized, as well as the quality of sources and investigative materials. The mechanics behind each type of writing assignments will be discussed in the seminars so you will be well prepared to meet the requirements of your written work.

And of course, just like in the real news business, you must always make your deadline.

All papers must be turned in by noon of due date, unless otherwise noted in class. Each day late deflates your grade by five points. Here are the types of stories you will be producing over the course of the semester.

### **Spot News Stories**

You will periodically be sent out in the field to cover a breaking news story or a trend story. These two-page assignments could range from a political protest march to an art exhibit at a local museum.

### **News feature**

This will be a four-page news feature on a topic of your choice. The key elements of news feature writing, such as choosing a subject, honing the focus, and adhering to proper style will be covered in detail well before the paper is due.

### **Opinion piece**

We will be hearing from many speakers who present a certain viewpoint on key media and political issues, such as abortion, gun control, race relations and global warming. For this paper, you will analyze an issue of your choice as if you were writing an opinion piece for a newspaper, a news magazine or a Webzine.

### **Profile**

This will be a five to six-page profile of any of our seminar speakers, or of another fascinating Washington personality you encounter during your stay. Profiles must include solid background reporting and multiple interviews with sources beyond your primary subject. Again, we will thoroughly cover profile writing during our seminars.

### **REQUIRED READINGS**

You are required to read *The Washington Post* daily, and *The New York Times* on Sundays. You will be evaluated on your knowledge of current events during class discussions, so please don't take this requirement lightly. You may also want to read *Time* or *Newsweek* each week, either the paper versions or online, and make it a point to catch evening news broadcasts, particularly the various dispatches on CNN.

Additionally, each week there will be handouts of magazine and newspaper articles. These supplements will focus on speakers for the upcoming week, and media issues to be discussed. It may sound like a lot to take in, but becoming saturated in the news is precisely what makes a good journalist.

The following is a list of required readings for this course. All readings are assigned on a weekly basis and will be provided on your weekly schedule. These books are not available in the American bookstore. You will get much better prices if you buy them from Amazon.com.

- Kovach & Rosenstiel. *Elements of Journalism*. Three Rivers Press, 2001
- Wallace, Mike and Knobel, Beth, *Heat and Light: Advice for the Next Generation of Journalists*, Three Rivers Press,
- Schieffer, Bob. *This Just In*. Berkley Trade. 2004 (paperback)
- Clark, Roy Peter, *Writing Tools*, Little Brown and Co. 2006
- *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*, 2011 Edition

## TOPICS TO BE COVERED

Please note that the topics provide the intended path of course. Reflecting the nature of the field of journalism, your academic path will take twists and turns, depending on speaker availability, and the latest breaking news.

**How Washington Works:** Overview of how the federal government operates with visits to the Senate Press Gallery, the White House, the Supreme Court and the Pentagon with talks with reporters who cover each one, as well as those who cover intelligence.

**What's Happening to Journalism:** With journalism in flux as technology changes how news is delivered. How Washington is covered has been changed radically, and not necessarily for the better. We will talk with people who are wrestling with the changes both in established media and in new media. Should journalism be supported by philanthropists? We will find out.

**The First Amendment:** Despite First Amendment Freedom afforded all journalists, there seems to be a great deal of restrictions on what exactly journalists simply can and cannot do. There are dangers of libel as well as other pitfalls. To understand the complexity of a journalist job, we will discuss the rights, freedoms and some even newer freedoms, such as those established under the Freedom of Information Act.

**Truth in Political Advertising?:** We will talk with people who create the political television ads and those who have made a career of establishing whether they are truthful. In this election year, this should be most enlightening.

**Investigative Reporting:** We will talk to people who make this a specialty and I am working on arranging special training so you can learn about computer assisted reporting and how you can delve into data bases to uncover great stories.

**Washington as a foreign beat:** We will visit the Foreign Press Center and talk with reporters who cover Washington for news outlets in Europe and Asia, as well as for Al Jazeera, the Arab news agency.

**Shaping the Message: How do the Spin Doctors Work?:** We will talk with public affairs who have been immersed in crisis and fought to control the message against a media onslaught.

**Think Tankers and Public Policy Wonks:** Who are think tanks and where do they come from? How do they get their message out? In order to properly understand the role of these non-government organizations, it is

first necessary to take a look at how they interact with the press and shape opinion.

### **The Broadcast Media**

We will talk with people in television and radio news. We will look at the differences in approach between broadcast and print journalism reporters, and focus on the emerging power of the multi-media capabilities of both print and broadcast.

### **Office House**

I keep no regular office hours, but I am ALWAYS available to talk with you by appointment or after class. I want to hear from you if you have any questions, have any problems or have suggestions on making improvements to the class.

## **THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY'S ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CODE**

As journalists it is always important to note when you are using sources. It has been said that a journalist is only as good as his or her last source, but perhaps it is more important to remember that a good journalist always gives proper credit where credit is due. Therefore, please take a moment to review the American University's Academic Integrity Code before you begin your first assignment.

**Academic Integrity.** Additional standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University's Academic Integrity Code that was provided in the registration packet and is available online. By participating in this program, every student has acknowledged her or his awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and is obliged to become familiar with her or his rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Please see me if you have any questions with regard to the code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will be taken seriously, and disciplinary actions will ensue should such violations occur. You can learn more about the Code by going to <http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.htm>.

### **About Professor Klein:**

I am a graduate of the American University master's program in journalism. I reported for the Tampa Tribune for about 10 years, starting by covering small towns in Polk County such as Frostproof and Eagle Lake. I became the Tribune's environment and transportation reporter, and also covered

such big stories as the Mariel Boat Lift and the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant disaster. I was sent to Washington in 1985 where I reported for all 23 papers owned by Media General, Inc. I covered the White House during the George H.W. Bush administration, the Supreme Court, and Congress during the Republican revolution and the Clinton impeachment. My reporting took me to Panama, Mexico, Colombia and Puerto Rico. Before leaving Media General at the end of 2007, I became a leader in multimedia reporting, working on major stories with the company's television stations and online services.

I was president of the National Press Club in 1994 and after leaving Media General, I toured the country for the Club in 2008, putting on forums on the future of journalism. My report on that experience can be found here: <http://press.org/about/journalism-juncture>.

I wrote the Club's centennial history, "Reliable Sources: 100 Years at the National Press Club." I was an adjunct professor for the Washington Semester Program in the 1990s, and I have been a full-time professor since the fall of 2010.

